

What Kind of Saviour?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 05 February 2020

Preacher: Stephen Ballingall

[0 : 00] Good afternoon, everyone. It is lovely to see you all here. If you've not got a seat yet, please do come on and grab one, and make sure you've got a Bible with you as we come to study God's Word. Today we're continuing in our studies in John, as we have been doing for about, I think, five or six months now, and we've finally made it to chapter six. I reckon it'll take us about three or four years to get through the whole thing, so I hope you're patient people, but we'll get there. So we're in chapter six today, which is on page 891 of the Blue Bibles you should have with you. So if you could turn that up, that'd be very helpful. John chapter six, page 891.

And as we do that, let's pray together. Our Lord and Father, as we come to your Word today, please help us to hear it well.

We know that your Word is powerful, that it's mighty to save, and is far more sharp than a two-edged sword. Please use your Word among us to help us trust in your Son as our Savior, and to follow Him in our lives as our King. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Amen. So let's read together John chapter six, verse one through 21. After this, Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias.

And a large crowd was following Him because they saw the signs that He was doing on the sick. Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat down with His disciples.

[1 : 43] Now at the Passover, the Feast of the Jews was at hand. Lifting up His eyes then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward Him, Jesus said to Philip, Wait are we to buy bread so that these people may eat?

He said this to test Him, for He Himself knew what He would do. Philip answered Him, Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.

One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?

Jesus said, Have the people sit down. Now there was much grass in the place, so the men sat down, about five thousand in number. Jesus then took the loaves, and when He had given thanks, He distributed them to those who were seated.

So also the fish, as much as they wanted. And when they had eaten their fill, He told His disciples, Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost.

[2 : 47] So they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten. When the people saw the sign that He had done, they said, This is indeed the prophet who has come into the world.

Perceiving then that they were about to come and take Him by force, to make Him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by Himself. When evening came, His disciples went down to the sea, got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum.

It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The sea became rough, because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rode about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were frightened.

But He said to them, It is I. Do not be afraid. Then they were glad to take Him into the boat, and immediately, the boat was at the land to which they were going.

Amen. When I was younger, one of my favorite TV shows to watch was the old classic catchphrase. I don't know if you'd remember it.

[3 : 59] It was an excellent show from the 80s and 90s, which was a firm Ballingol family favorite, with us usually sitting down, I think it was about five o'clock on a Saturday evening as my mum made the dinner, and all watching it together as a family.

Now, I was generally rubbish at it. My brothers used to make fun of me for it. But my favorite rounds were where you had this blank screen, and slowly, bit by bit, parts of a picture were added into this screen.

And they represented a catchphrase of some sort that you had to shout out. And as each section of the picture was added in, you got more of an idea of what the catchphrase was meant to be.

And you were, as the presenter Roy Walker used to say, say what you see, say what you see. Well, John seems to have used a similar technique. I don't know if he was a fan of catchphrase.

We'll never know, really. And he wants us to look at these different scenes he presents us with and build up a picture of what he's trying to get across. These two events we've just read about are closely linked as they work together to build up a picture of who Jesus is that John wants us to see in one piece.

[5 : 06] He wants us to pick up the hints and have a clear picture in our mind of who Jesus is and what he came to do. That's what's at the heart of this passage we just read.

The question of what kind of saviour is Jesus? Well, let's see this evidence that John presents as we look at the two scenes we read. Firstly, seeing scene one, feeding the many.

It's worth saying before we get into these events that nothing in this narrative should make us think anything other than this is truth. John doesn't want us to look at this as being fanciful thinking or as some kind of trick that Jesus managed to pull or as some kind of moralistic example of sharing that we're meant to follow.

But these are real events. These are history. John records them like that so we're to treat them as such. And to be honest, if you've been reading through John with us and got to this point after everything that Jesus has said about himself and done, then something like this, well, it shouldn't come as a surprise to us at all.

Yes, it's amazing. It's hard to believe. But if he is who he says he is, then it shouldn't be something we instantly dismiss or try to explain away into nothing.

[6 : 26] Well, Jesus has taken his disciples for a walk. They're all heading up a mountain and they weren't alone. They've got company. Verse two. A large crowd was following him because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick.

There was a massive group of people who had heard the signs Jesus was doing and decided to come along and see what happened next. See for themselves what was happening with this man, Jesus.

They might be looking for something quite impressive to happen because they're following him for his signs he's done on the sick, his miracles, rather than his message. But lunchtime strikes, everyone's hungry, the stomachs start to rumble, and people didn't bring anything to eat with them. So, Jesus gets to work. He asks Philip about food who's local to the area and he might know if somewhere they can get something to feed people, but he's not too optimistic about the situation. And Jesus asks him so that verse six, he could test Philip. Jesus knew very well what was going to happen next, but he was testing who Philip thought Jesus was.

[7 : 37] Did Philip think that Jesus could provide miraculously? Was that even on his radar? Had he understood enough of Jesus' teaching to know what he was capable of? Apparently not.

As we see in verse seven. Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little. A denarii was a day's wage, so Philip was saying that there were so many people that about eight months' wages wouldn't be enough to feed them, even a tiny bit, even just a few crumbs.

Where on earth would the disciples find enough food to feed all these people? They're hungry.

Where are they going to get the food for them? Thankfully, the disciple Andrew pipes up. He's found something useful.

He says in verse nine, there's a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, and then realism hits, and the optimism slowly dies out.

He continues. But what are they for so many? This boy brings all he has and he offers it to Jesus.

He only has these five small barley loaves and two pickled fish, just about enough for his own lunch to keep him going.

[8 : 52] So Jesus gets everyone to sit down, he gives thanks to God for the food, and then starts handing it out to everyone there. And miraculously, the five little loaves and two pickled fish, they keep going and going and going.

They feed everyone in the group, which was at the very least 5,000. John says there were 5,000 men. He's not including the women and the children there.

So far more than 5,000 were fed with these little loaves and fish. This boy's packed lunch. And they were fed well. Verses 11 and 12 said that they had as much as they wanted.

They ate their fill. They weren't feeding off scraps, but they were well looked after. They were full. And not only were they fed well, but there were leftovers even.

Look at verse 13 with me. So they gathered them up and filled 12 baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten.

[9 : 56] 12 baskets full of leftover bread when five barley loaves wouldn't even have come close to filling one. It's incredible, isn't it? Jesus, someone who in verse 14 the people recognize as being the great prophet has miraculously provided for God's people with bread from heaven.

That's our first part of the picture we're seeing. Miraculous bread from heaven. Let's now see the second miracle John presents us with as we see scene two walking on water.

After this miracle, Jesus has withdrawn to a quiet place and the disciples have gone off on their own. They've gone down to the sea to cross it to go to Capernaum on the other side. Now it's dark, the sun has set, but some of the disciples are fishermen so they should be alright.

They know what they're doing. They're not too worried about it. But once they get on their way, a storm kicks up. Verse 18. The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing.

And they're only about halfway across at this point. Three or four miles in which means they're still about three or four miles from the other side. Away from safety. But that's not what worried them the most.

[11 : 14] They had something far more terrifying to deal with. Verse 19. When they'd rode about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat.

And they were frightened. Jesus, all on his own, walking on water in the middle of the Sea of Galilee.

It's incredible. He's nowhere to be seen and then suddenly appears in the middle of this huge sea. Can you imagine for a second what that must have been like for the disciples?

Rowing away, working hard to get themselves to safety. The storm raging when swirling around. Waves bringing water crashing down onto the deck. Everyone in a panic and then suddenly everything just stops.

They all see a figure approaching them in the distance and it's not another boat but a man. And the man isn't swimming even.

[12 : 26] He's not struggling to stay above water. He's walking on it as though it's just normal ground. It's mind-blowing stuff.

How can this really be happening? Well, their eyes aren't lying to them. This isn't some trick where Jesus is walking on a sandbank or anything like that.

John doesn't want us to think that at all. Jesus really is walking on the water. Simple as that. When the disciples are faced with the glory of Jesus before them, the Lord of creation walking on water, they're terrified.

If you were presented with someone doing something that completely defied all the laws of physics and everything you thought was true, then I'm sure you'd be terrified too. I know I would be.

Who is this man? How on earth is he doing this? What does this all mean? Then Jesus, knowing their fear over what was happening, says to them in verse 20, It is I to not be afraid.

[13 : 34] Or literally translated, I am. Do not be afraid. Just as in the chapter 5 before, Jesus is equating himself with God using the divine name for himself.

I am. The words God said to Moses in the burning bush when he revealed his name to him. Jesus doesn't just perform mighty works like God.

He doesn't just look like him, but he talks like him too. So the disciples get him in the boat, they're glad to get him on board, and then they're immediately where they were headed.

So our picture is starting to take more shape. After miraculous bread comes from heaven, we have Jesus, the great I am, displaying his mastery over water who can deliver God's people through the uncontrollable sea.

And the timing of these events matters too. Look at verse 4. The feeding of the 5,000 and the walking on water all happened in verse 4 at the time of the Passover, the feast of the Jews.

[14:45] And this wasn't just like any other celebration. This wasn't like Burns Night. This was a widespread, nationalistic fervor. It's more like Independence Day in America or the 12th of July in Northern Ireland or Bastille Day in France.

It was huge. Feasts, celebrations, parades, speeches, parties, national holidays, flags everywhere, everything. The whole country stopped to remember and celebrate this.

All of Israel ground to a halt so that they could remember how God had brought judgment on his enemies and rescued his people, provide for them with bread from heaven and save them from the Egyptians through his mastery over water, the Red Sea.

Well, what kind of conclusion are we to make from this? What does John want us to see? What's our picture looking like? Well, we need to remember who John's writing to.

He's writing to a primarily Jewish audience. His readers, they know the law, they know the scriptures, they know the Old Testament stories, they know the stories of how God's rescued his people from judgment.

[15:57] They're very clued up on that. And they have in front of them a picture of a man who has brought miraculous bread from heaven, a man who has mastery over water.

Jesus saying, he is the I am. And all of this is happening at the time of Passover. If you connect all those dots, you're left with one big event from the Old Testament before you.

If Roy Walker told the readers to say what you say, say what you see, they'd be shouting out, easy, it's the Exodus. It couldn't be more obvious. They're thinking of the Passover time, the manna from heaven, the parting of the Red Sea, the burning bush that says, I am who I am.

And they're seeing all of this taking place within this man, Jesus. He is the God of the Exodus in human form before them.

And thankfully, the crowd following Jesus recognized the importance of what's happening. Here's what they said in verse 14. When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, this is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.

[17:12] This is the prophet, the one Moses spoke of in Deuteronomy 18, the prophet like Moses who would lead God's people out of captivity. They think that this prophet is going to be rescuing them from the Roman oppressors who are occupying the land.

They're thinking to themselves, this is the Exodus part two. We're going to be rescued from bondage to the Romans, just like in Egypt. There's 5,000 men here who could all fight.

If all of us march with Jesus to Roman-occupied Jerusalem on the day of Passover, it's revolution time. We're overthrowing the Romans. Freedom is coming here and now.

But that's not why Jesus came. That's not the conclusion he wanted the people to make. Look at what he says in verse 15. Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

Jesus himself wants to be understood in a particular way. Unfortunately, the crowd have got it wrong. They've put two and two together and got five.

[18:25] They recognize that Jesus is the God of the Exodus, but then think that he's come to solve their problems in the here and now to overthrow the Roman occupiers despite him never saying that that was his purpose.

He was never about doing that. But the thing is, they weren't hoping for too much with Jesus. That couldn't be more wrong. He's not a letdown.

He's not a disappointment. They were actually hoping for too little because Jesus is the prophet and he is the God of the Exodus, but he comes for a far greater, far more certain and far more long-lasting salvation than that.

He's not just rescuing them from human, temporary, passing troubles, but he's rescuing them from the eternal punishment of sin. It's a far greater salvation than what these people had in mind when they wanted to make him king.

Jesus himself wants to be understood in a particular way. He didn't want to be whisked off to be made their king. He had something greater in mind.

[19:33] His path to glory was very different from that. He had to go to the cross before receiving the crown with no shortcuts. He wasn't just interested in their temporary needs.

He did care about them a great deal, but is concerned primarily with their eternal security, of making them one with the Father forever. That's the kind of saviour he is.

He's focused not on the here and now, but the there and then. That's his primary focus. So that leaves us to ask, what kind of saviour are you looking for?

That's what John wants us to be thinking about here. What kind of saviour is Jesus? Is he the kind of saviour the people want in verse 2 who will just be nice to people and do lots of impressive miracles?

Or is he the kind of saviour the people want in verse 15 who will do a great social justice in the world today? Well, no, because he's a far better saviour than that.

[20 : 44] He's come to do much more than just help us in the here and now. But we struggle to accept that sometimes, don't we? We want Jesus to fix all of our problems now. That's why millions of people flock to churches that preach exactly that.

That Jesus will let you have everything now. That he died so you can have everything now. There's plenty of that on the God channel on TV because people want a saviour like that.

One who will do the impressive and help you now. I'm sure many of you have friends who think like that and want Jesus to be their saviour of here and now, focusing on that, fixing all of their problems in this life and giving them a healthy and happy family to love and enjoy.

And of course, we're not going to fall for that, are we? No, we're not that gullible. At least we don't think we are. But deep down, don't we all think that being a Christian should just make life a little bit better now or a bit easier now?

Don't we all think that insight? That being a Christian should make our lives here and now at least a little bit better? We think that when we pray, all our prayers should be answered with a resounding yes from heaven or at least more than half of them.

[22 : 08] We think our loved ones shouldn't have to endure pain. We think our friends who are such faithful Christians shouldn't have to suffer for their faith, that they shouldn't be put into situations that put themselves in danger.

I mean, we're on God's side, so if he's going to bless anyone, it's going to be us, right? But when we do that, when we reduce Jesus to being the saviour of just here and now, then we're making him far too small because he's the God of eternity, come to make us right with God forever.

His path to glory was the cross before the crown and ours must be too. If we keep focusing on him solving our problems now, then we're just like the crowd chasing after him, hoping he'll perform a miracle and make it all better for a brief time.

Our lives do have real pain in them now, they do have real struggle. We all feel that. And acts like these ones we've read of today don't teach us that they're all going to be made right or fixed here and now.

They are all going to be made right, made better than we could ever imagine. But that's not happening here and now. But when Christ returns at the right time and brings in his perfect, eternal kingdom, these miracles we've read of today are a beautiful foretaste of what his kingdom is going to be like there and then.

[23 : 44] Let's pray together. Our God and Father, we thank you that you love the world so much that you sent your son into it so that all who believe in him may not die but have eternal life in his name.

Please help us to know your son as our saviour. Not to look at him as the saviour of just here and now, but the saviour of eternity who came to rescue God's people from the punishment they deserve for their sin.

please help us to see Jesus as he wants to be seen. In his name we pray. Amen.